

Coins

'43 penny: \$40,000 payoff

By Roger Boye

HERE ARE answers to several questions from Tribune readers.

Q — A magazine advertisement says that certain 1943 pennies are worth big money, perhaps as much as \$40,000 each. I have two silver-colored cents dated 1943. What's the difference between the super-rare pennies and normal 1943 cents? — M.A., Palos Hills.

A — In 1943 the United States Mint made Lincoln cents out of steel coated with zinc because Army generals needed copper to make weapons for World War II. Coinage presses churned out more than a billion steel cents with a "silver-colored appearance"; today, those coins in fine condition sell for 25 cents or less.

By accident, however, government workers made a handful of 1943 cents out of copper. Although no one knows the precise number of 1943 copper cents in existence, they are among the rarest coins of this century.

In 1944 Uncle Sam resumed minting

cents out of the normal alloy of 95 per cent copper and 5 per cent zinc.

Q — I've been taking a careful look at the Lincoln pennies in my small collection and noticed that the placement of the "D" mint marks varies a bit from coin to coin. Is that unusual? — L.B., Chicago.

A — No. Mint marks are punched into coin dies (metal objects used to make coins) by hand; thus, slight variations in the location of the "D's" are normal.

Q — I'm well aware that nickels made during World War II contain silver. But someone told me that all nickels minted before 1964 also have silver. Is this true? — H.J., Hinsdale.

A — Except for the so-called "war nickels," U.S. nickels do not contain silver. They are made with copper and nickel.

Questions about old coins or currency? Send them to Roger Boye, Arts & Fun, Chicago Tribune, 435 N. Michigan Av., Chicago, Ill. 60611. Enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope if you want a personal reply.